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Bright Epoch: Women and Coeducation in the American West

Christine A. Ogren

University of Iowa

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Bennett's equally interesting movements around De Witt. Her notes on unruly pupils, unequal pay, and the attentions of would-be suitors provide fascinating details of a working woman's life in Iowa. Carpenter's and Bennett's dedication to temperance and other community reform organizations provides insight into what drew both men and women to those causes. Finally, the letters suggest both the trials of pioneering and the ties that still bound migrants tightly to home communities. The interpretation provided by Tyler and Henshaw is just one of many frameworks for reading this set of engaging letters.

Bright Epoch: Women and Coeducation in the American West, by Andrea G. Radke-Moss. Women in the West Series. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008. xii, 352 pp. Illustrations, tables, graphs, notes, bibliography, index. \$45.00 cloth.

Reviewer Christine A. Ogren is associate professor of history of education in the Social Foundations and Higher Education programs at the University of Iowa. She is the author of *The American State Normal School: "An Instrument of Good"* (2005).

Andrea G. Radke-Moss opens *Bright Epoch* with the story of Adonijah Strong Welch's inauguration as the first president of Iowa Agricultural College in Ames in 1869. His speech focused on "two great and salutary educational reforms": the inclusion of "branches of natural science" and the "free admission of young women, on equal terms with young men, to all the privileges and honors which the institution can bestow" (3). The book explores the results of the latter reform — "the practices of coeducation at land-grant colleges" (1) — specifically at the Ames institution (which became Iowa State University), the University of Nebraska in Lincoln, Oregon Agricultural College in Corvallis, and Utah Agricultural College in Logan. Between 1870 and 1900, Radke-Moss argues, these colleges "accepted women's intellectual equality, at least in general, but they nevertheless struggled to work out the actual practices of mixing the sexes. . . . Out of this interplay between separation and inclusion, women students succeeded in negotiating new spaces of gendered inclusion and equality at land-grant colleges" (2). Thus, this period "might be considered a 'bright epoch' for gender inclusion during the history of coeducational practice" (289).

Student experiences and perspectives are Radke-Moss's primary focus; her main source materials are literary society minutes, yearbooks, student newspapers, and diaries, as well as course catalogs. Institutional policies and leaders fade into the background as she de-

scribes "a culture of competing forces of separation and inclusion for women" (12). Only one chapter, "Women's Course Work: Farm Wives, Finished Ladies, or Functioning Scientists?" focuses on the formal curriculum. Devoting the other seven chapters to campus climate and student life allows Radke-Moss to present a rich and nuanced treatment of this "culture of competing forces."

"The story" she tells "of the negotiation of gendered spaces" (289) is an especially compelling contribution of her work. In chapters on "the discourse of coeducational inclusion," "the language and practice of gender separation," and "literary societies as laboratories for separation and inclusion," Radke-Moss teases apart students' discussions of coeducation in their newspapers and literary society proceedings, carefully and convincingly explaining how they could defend and celebrate coeducation while also subscribing to separate gender roles. For example, she illustrates how literary society debates "became important avenues for women to develop intellectually, socially, and politically. Yet within that advancement lay subtle forces for gender segregation, through the use of language, ideology, and physical separation" (80). In the chapter titled "Women's Students' Sociality: Building Relationships with Men and Women," Radke-Moss describes how gender separation in some areas combined with increasingly liberal practices in others to create "structured levels of gender interaction that heightened men's and women's awareness and regard for each other" (141). In chapters on women's sports and military activity, she discusses how military drills in the 1870s through the 1890s, basketball in the 1900s, and field hockey in the 1910s allowed women to enjoy the limelight and to push the boundaries of gender expectations — within limits. An especially rich illustration is the battalion of Iowa Agricultural College female cadets who marched and drilled at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. "By using masculine military clothing with feminine adornments" such as jewelry and bows, "these women successfully entered male space while still maintaining their femininity" (237). Finally, in "Challenging Political Separation: Women's Rights Activism," Radke-Moss explores how both female and male students debated women's issues, including dress reform, legal rights, and especially suffrage. When Iowa Agricultural College student Carrie Lane (later Chapman Catt) presented what was likely her first speech on women's rights, the student newspaper reflected competing forces in describing it as "a little overdrawn," yet the "best of the evening" (282–83).

Radke-Moss situates her work well within western history, stating that it is "a study of the American West," but not of "western exceptionalism." Although conditions made the West receptive to coeducation,

the key issue was "how westerners perceived themselves in relation to the East" (4-5). Unfortunately, her grounding in the historiography of women's and higher education is less thorough; she overlooks recent works on the history of normal schools, academies, and colleges that contradict her claims that western land-grant institutions were unique in allowing women to pursue military training and to engage in physical activity under "the gaze of male or mixed-gender audiences" (203), and in offering fine arts along with practical courses, including domestic science. She seems puzzled that the curriculum offered "rugged farm daughters" elements of "genteel finishing" (153), but historians of education understand that students from lower-class and farming backgrounds were commonly interested in classical education for social class mobility. Their desire to gain cultural capital shaped the curriculum and culture of land-grant and other institutions. It is surprising that Radke-Moss largely overlooks student agency in relation to social class because students' roles in shaping gender practices are so central to her account. She may go a little too far in suggesting that their land-grant experiences *caused* women graduates to be activists later in life, but *Bright Epoch* leaves no doubt that women students successfully negotiated new gender roles. As Radke-Moss hopes, her "framework of examining gender relations" may indeed "serve as a model for understanding gender negotiations in higher education and other historical contexts" (303).

"Follow the Flag": A History of the Wabash Railroad Company, by H. Roger Grant. Railroads in America Series. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2004. xii, 292 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, index. \$49.95 cloth.

The Hook and Eye: A History of the Iowa Central Railway, by Don L. Hofsommer. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005. x, 154 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$34.95 cloth.

Reviewer William Friedrichs is professor of history and director of the Iowa History Center at Simpson College. He is the first recipient of the Iowa History Prize.

Roger Grant and Don Hofsommer are among our leading railroad historians. For nearly four decades, these two prolific scholars have been producing solidly researched, well-written, lavishly illustrated books about a number of the nation's railroads. These two studies are no exception. Grant writes of the regional Wabash, while Hofsommer examines the small Iowa Central Railway.